



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' 2009 annual wolf program report summarizes successful efforts to implement the approved state plan to the extent allowed by federal regulations. FWP leads wolf monitoring, directs conflict management, coordinates and authorizes research, and leads outreach efforts. FWP works closely with Tribes, a variety of other state and federal agencies, interested organizations and individuals to continue the transition to managing wolves like other wildlife. Wolves were delisted in May, 2009.

Montana's wolf conservation and management plan is based on the work of the wolf advisory council, a diverse working group. Its balanced approach ensures the long-term success of wolf recovery in a landscape where people live, work, and recreate. The plan:

- recognizes wolves as a native species and part of Montana's wildlife heritage,
- allows wolves to find their place on the landscape similar to other wildlife, and
- manages the population in concert with available habitat, prey species, livestock conflicts, and human safety.

2009 Highlights

Wolf Numbers

- The population is secure but dynamic. Wolves share a landscape with people. Like other wildlife species, Montana's wolf population is subject to checks and balances, including strong reproduction in some areas, disease, vehicle strikes, and mortality due to conflicts with people.
- As of Dec. 31, 2009, FWP documented at least 524 wolves in 101 verified packs, 37 of which qualified as a "breeding pair." That's about a 4% increase from last year, compared to 18% the previous year. The rate of population growth is slowing down, in part because of the dampening effect of the combination of public harvest and agency control and because the best habitat is already occupied. Nonetheless, mortality was not high enough to stop or reverse population growth and the population is secure and well above recovery levels. A minimum of 166 pups were documented in 2009.
- The wolf population is distributed as follows:
 - Wolf Management Unit 1, Northwest Montana: at least 308 wolves in 64 packs, 23 breeding pairs.
 - Wolf Management Unit 2, Western Montana: at least 110 wolves in 20 packs, 5 breeding pairs.
 - Wolf Management Unit 3, Southwestern Montana: at least 106 wolves in 17 packs, 9 breeding pairs.
 - One and six packs occur on the Blackfeet and Flathead Indian reservations, respectively.
- Wolf Management Unit 1 accounted for the majority of the increase. Numbers in western and southwestern Montana remained stable or decreased slightly. Twenty-three packs straddle the Montana/Idaho border, and 14 of them are counted in Montana. Nine others are counted in the Idaho population. Additionally the Montana population grew of its own accord through numerous dispersals and formation of new packs.
- A total of 255 wolf mortalities were documented in Montana in 2009, 57% of which was livestock related (n=145 wolves). The remaining mortalities were: 68 legal harvest, 8 car/train strikes, 16 illegal, 1 incidental and agency-related, 2 natural, 2 electrocuted, 1 self defense, and 12 unknown.

Wolf Distribution

- Statewide, wolf distribution remained about the same. New 2009 packs established primarily in northwestern and western Montana near the ID border. But wolves are great travelers and could show up anywhere in Montana. Many dispersal events were documented and 26 new packs formed in 2009.

- About 90% of the Montana wolf population lives outside national parks on a combination of public and private lands.
- The public can help FWP monitor the wolf population by reporting wolves or wolf sign to FWP.

Outreach Activities

- Increasing public awareness of wolves and their management is a top priority for FWP. FWP works with local communities to incorporate wolves into the landscape and to strike the balance between wolves and people. Other FWP staff, USDA Wildlife Services personnel, and our tribal wildlife partners also provided information and did public outreach.
- Outreach efforts take many forms, including one-on-one conversations, media interviews, printed materials, documentary films, FWP Outdoor Reports and press releases, and formal presentations.
- FWP's wolf staff gave a minimum of 63 formal presentations to about 2800 people in 2009, but literally spoke to thousands more about wolf ecology, wolf-livestock interactions, wolf-big game interactions, human safety, Montana's wolf plan, federal delisting efforts, and more. Dozens of media interviews occurred, too.
- FWP's wolf management Web pages are very popular and visitors spend more time on the wolf pages than the average of all other FWP Web pages visited. In 2009, the FWP wolf web page was visited about 109,648 times, averaging about 150-400 visits day. The web page for hunters to track progress towards filling the wolf quotas was viewed 32,848 times between September 15 and November 2.

Wolf-Livestock Interactions

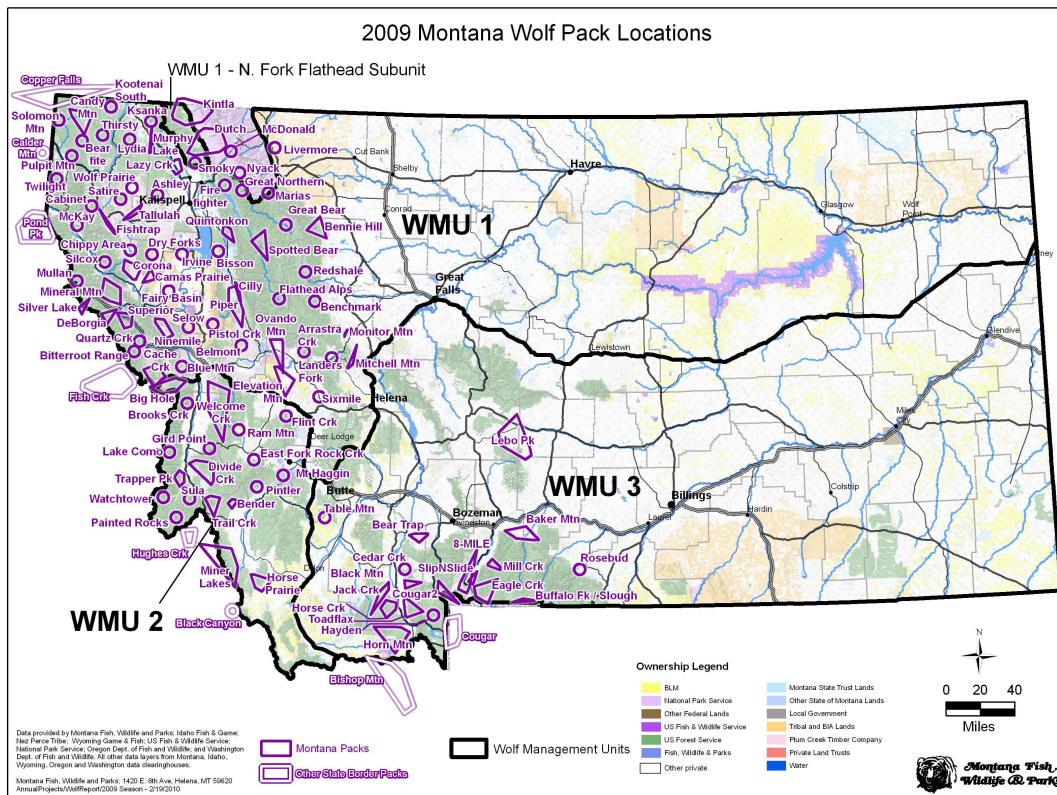
- Montana wolves routinely encounter livestock, though preying on them seems to be a learned behavior. Wolf depredation on livestock is difficult to predict in space and time.
- FWP and WS work together to reduce the risk of loss and address conflicts using a combination of non-lethal and lethal tools. With delisting, FWP decisions are guided by state laws, state regulations and the state plan. Conflicts are addressed on a case-by-case basis, striving to connect the agency response to the damage in space and time. This is similar to the approach taken when other wildlife species damage private property in Montana and lethal control is directed at the problem animals causing the damage.
- The Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program got underway in 2008. The goals are to decrease risk of livestock loss through proactive tools and to reimburse losses. The Governor-appointed Board meets twice a year. With a small general fund appropriation and a significant donation from Defenders of Wildlife, \$141,462 in claims was paid for confirmed and probable death losses in 2009.
- Confirmed cattle death losses increased to 97 in 2009, and confirmed sheep death losses increased to 202. Other confirmed livestock losses include: 4 llamas, 4 dogs, and 2 goats. Other injury and death losses were not verified or were deemed "probable." Other impacts are difficult to quantify, but do occur.
- A total of 145 wolves were killed to prevent further depredations. Private citizens killed 10 wolves caught actively chasing or attacking livestock and no wolves were killed by special permit.

Funding, Delisting, and Regulated Public Hunting

- With Montanans' support, FWP took on the new responsibility of wolf conservation and management in 2004, contingent on federal funding. Federal funding continued in 2009. Montana is focused on securing adequate funding from federal and private sources for the long term.
- Wolves were delisted for a second time in May 2009 and legal challenges resumed. Montana intervened in the lawsuit by supporting delisting efforts. An injunction request was denied in September. All legal briefs have been filed and no decision in the case had been issued as of December 2009.
- Montana's first fair chase wolf hunting season occurred in 2009, with a total harvest of 72 wolves. The season went very smoothly and there were no biological red flags. Regulated public harvest will be an important population management tool for wolves, just as it has been for Montana's other big game species.

See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>

- to read and download the full Montana Wolf Conservation and Management 2009 Annual Report
- to report wolves and wolf sign
- to learn more about wolves, their management, and the state program



Who Do I Contact?

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (to get information about wolves and wolf management):

Carolyn Sime
Gray Wolf Program Coordinator, Helena
406-461-0587 casime@mt.gov

Kent Laudon
Wolf Management Specialist, Kalispell
406-250-5047 klaudon@mt.gov

Liz Bradley
Wolf Management Specialist, Missoula
406-865-0017 lbradley@mt.gov

Nathan Lance
Wolf Management Specialist, Butte
406-425-3355 nlance@mt.gov

Mike Ross
Wolf Management Specialist, Bozeman
406-581-3664 mross@mt.gov

USDA Wildlife Services (to request investigations of injured or dead livestock):

Kraig Glazier, Helena
406-458-0106
Kraig.L.Glazier@aphis.usda.gov

John Steuber or Mike Foster, Billings
406-657-6464
John.E.Steuber@aphis.usda.gov or Mike.Foster@aphis.usda.gov

To Report a Dead Wolf or Possible Illegal Activity:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:
Missoula, Montana: (406) 329-3000
Casper, Wyoming: (307) 261-6365

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
1-800-TIP-MONT
Nearest FWP Regional Office or game warden

To learn more about Montana's Livestock Reduction and Mitigation Program and the Board's work:

George Edwards
Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator, Helena
406- 444-5609 gedwards@mt.gov